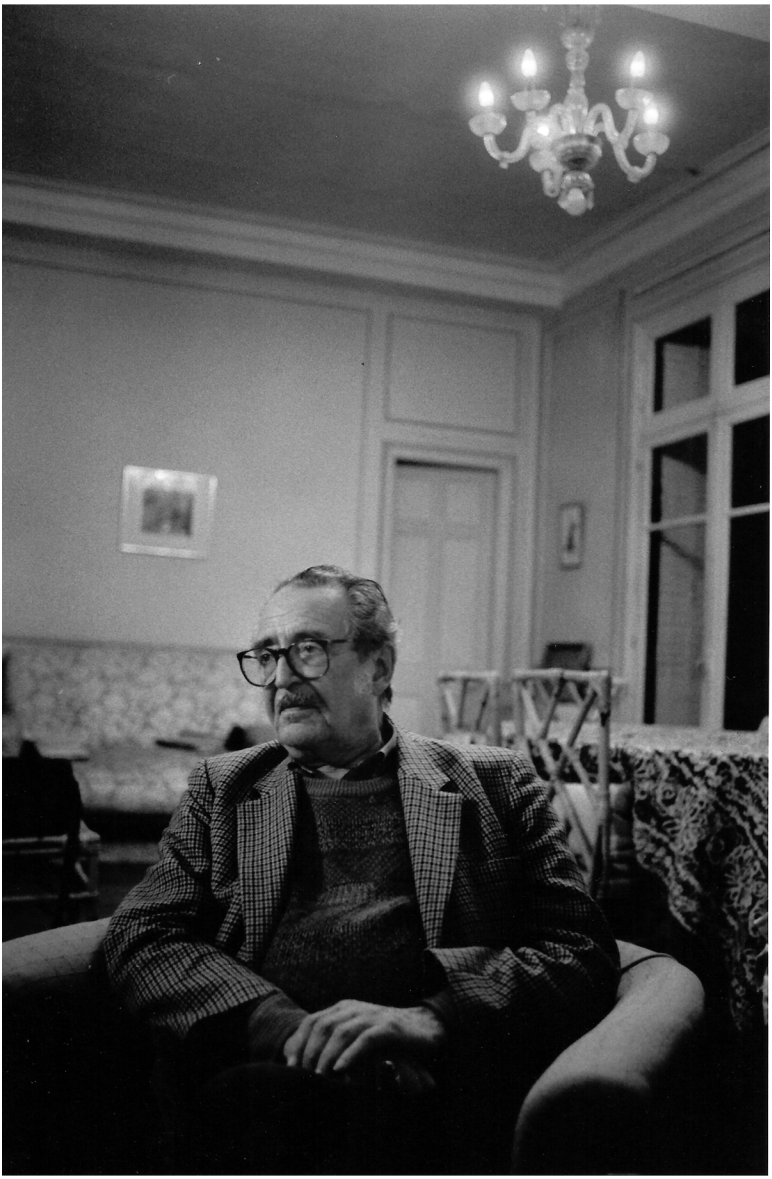
Edouard Roditi

The Quest for the Lost Proust

Alyscamps Press
Paris

The Quest for the Lost Proust



Edouard Roditi

The Quest for the Lost Proust

Edited, with a
Preface
By
Karl Orend

Alyscamps Press
Paris

The Quest for the Lost Proust by Edouard Roditi.

This edition Copyright © 2019 by Alyscamps Press, Paris.

This edition is dedicated to Michael Neal.

The Quest for the Lost Proust

Preface

Edouard Roditi is little known to the general public, even if amongst those with a deep interest in literature and art he is often seen as an important and brilliant contributor in the fields of literature, translation, and art and literary criticism. Born into a Sephardic family in Paris in 1910, Roditi studied at Oxford and The University of Chicago, and from his early years had contact with important figures in twentieth century literature. At the age of nineteen he published the first Surrealist manifesto in English, entitled *The New Reality*. He worked at *Éditions de Saggitaire*, a major publisher of Surrealist works, and was a friend of several Surrealists, especially André Breton, whose work he later translated. He had also begun to translate Léon-Paul Fargue and other important French writers before he was twenty.

Roditi befriended James Joyce, T.S. Eliot, Gertrude Stein, Sylvia Beach, Samuel Beckett

and many other literary figures, also publishing in, among others, *Transition* and *The Criterion*. Between 1929-37 he lived in London, Paris and Berlin. He moved to America once the likelihood of War became imminent. He was later an interpreter at the Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunal. For the rest of his life, first in America, and later in Paris, Roditi held several important teaching positions at Universities, and worked as a high-level translator and simultaneous interpreter, often for the American Government. Roditi was multilingual and made his name as a major literary translator from and into languages as diverse as German, Portuguese, Hebrew, Spanish, Danish and Turkish. For example, he translated Fernando Pessoa's poems into German and Yeshar Kemal into English. Roditi published and translated many books, ranging from short stories and poems to literary essays, memoirs, novels, literary and art criticism and interviews with famous subjects. Some of his books, such as *Dialogues on Art*, are considered modern classics.

In the latter part of his life, Edouard Roditi wrote a series of essays and short memoirs about his interactions with famous writers. The following essay is one of the most personal, but it is also an important meditation on the transformation that occurs when a writer uses events and people from their own lives in the composition of fiction. Even the most seemingly autobiographical of writers, such as Henry Miller, are in fact completely transforming their daily lives and personalities and those of the models for their characters to the point one usually would not recognize them if one read about them first and then met them. Eudora Welty, when she met the author of *Tropic of Cancer* said that he seemed like a mild mannered store clerk, and not the braggadocio-filled hero of his sexcapades. This dichotomy between real life and public image was at the heart of many of Roditi's essays on writers, such as that on Paul Celan, whom he saw as a figurehead for a cult of personality. He believed that Celan had been sanctified and was considered above all criticism because of his close identification as "bard of the Holocaust."

Writing about his private life became taboo. Roditi provides a stark reminder that biographies are not fixed, and they do not tell the whole story, determined as they are by the filter the author chooses consciously or unconsciously to place upon them, and the demands of the public.

The following essay by Roditi sheds new light on Marcel Proust, both through the author's own personal memories and remembrances of those who knew them both. It brings the everyday man into focus through small details and chance encounters, providing us with a new perspective on Proust the man, who became one of the great writers of his time.

Karl Orend
Meudon

THE QUEST FOR LOST PROUST

Unpublished

In The past recaptured, which constitutes the last section of Remembrance of things past, Marcel Proust tells us how, after many years of painful hesitation, his autobiographical but nevertheless fictional hero was finally able to write his long novel that thus begins being written where it ends. He was staying in a country home where his hostess lent him her copy of the still unpublished Journal of the Goncourt brothers. Reading it, he was fascinated by the intelligence and charm of the people described there, and began to wonder why, in his own social life, he had never been privileged to associate with such interesting people. Suddenly, it dawned on him that the people described in this Journal were those whom he too had known for many years, but had always found vulgar, foolish or insignificant, and he thus began to understand that memory or art can transform our dullest experiences, raising the insignificant to a new level where, no longer present, it acquires significance and ceases to be dull. How fascinating the most dreary and conventional society-women can appear to have been, in their portraits by great artists! How much more significant are the characters of a great novel than the drab real-life people who may originally have inspired its author!

Memory, like a painting by Giorgio de Chirico, has its false perspectives too, where experiences that seemed to be insignificant when they were in the foreground of the present can loom ever larger in the distance as they recede from us in time. As the years go by, the fascinating game of speculating about "what might have been, if only...." can also embellish or enlarge what actually happened, until we no longer distinguish what happened from what we later imagined. Finally, later experiences supprimpose themselves too on earlier ones, lending to these a posthumous significance in a series of double exposures, like those of a photographic film, so that the original event is thereby transformed so as to fit better into our total experience at some later date than in that of the time when this event originally occurred.

Likewise Proust himself, a few years after his death, began to write

become the victim of such tricks of memory, in the minds of others who had known him and been merely tolerant of him as a verbose and affected snob, but who now discovered, often to their surprise, that they had known and repeatedly met, over the years, a great writer. When articles and books began to be published identifying the real-life persons identified whom Proust had used as models for his fictional characters, many of those who had known and neglected him were even offended because he had failed to remember them, if only as models for such minor or grotesque characters as Madame de Cambremer.

Leon Suares, an elderly Egyptian-jewish banker who was a friend of my uncle Victor Roditi, perhaps distantly related to my paternal grandmother and, in any case, closely related to my friends, both writers, Carlo Suares and Georges Cattaui, was one of those who discovered only after Proust's death that they had been privileged to associate with a great writer. Bored with his life and his business in Alexandria, Leon Suares had long made a habit of spending much of his time in Paris, where he was a regular customer of the Hotel Ritz and, as a lavish host, had gradually obtained access to some circles of Paris society. One day in the late Twenties, he invited his young relative Georges Cattaui to lunch with him at the Ritz. Georges had then completed his studies and was about to enter upon his brief but socially brilliant career as a diplomat in the Egyptian Embassy in London. Knowing that Georges also had some ambitions as a writer, Leon asked him a few polite questions about his work. Georges replied that he was writing a book on Marcel Proust.

"Who is that?", Leon Suares asked. "The greatest writer of our age," Georges Cattaui replied without any hesitation. Leon Suares then remembered having often met a Monsieur Proust at the Ritz, "A man who used to hang around here late at night and seemed to know everybody and was very fussy about the service, but was known to give extravagant tips." Fascinated, Georges explained that this Monsieur Proust could only

have been the great novelist who was now the subject of his own research. "But I knew him very well," Leon Suares exclaimed, and then began to recount how, for many years, Proust had vaguely spoken to him of spending a winter in Egypt, having heard that its dry desert air was good for asthma. "In fact," Leon Suares added, "I sent him a lot of information about suitable hotels in Cairo and Luxor, and even invited him to stay with me in Alexandria. He wrote me endless letters about this trip that never materialized, and I must still have his letters somewhere at home in my old files of correspondence." Cattaui then revealed that such letters would be valuable literary documents, and that a Paris publisher was already planning an edition of whatever letters from Proust could still be found.

Soon after this lunch-conversation at the Ritz, Leon Suares returned to his home in Alexandria, where he ransacked every nook and corner in a fruitless search for Proust's letters, but never found any of them. He even accused his whole staff of Greek and Arab servants of having stolen them, as if these poor illiterates had known their value while he himself was still unaware of it. In the few remaining years of his life, however, Leon Suares, with his vivid anecdotes about "that man Proust of the Ritz", became a welcome guest in some of those circles of Paris society to which he had previously failed to obtain easy access.

My own memories of Proust are of an even more shadowy nature than those of Leon Suares. In fact, I have never been able to believe without any doubt that it was really Marcel Proust whom I once met, as I have been told, in my childhood. Still, I have it on fairly reliable authority that I did meet Proust, and I really remember once meeting an odd and haggard man who questioned me at great length about the symptoms of my asthma and who may well have been the author of Remembrance of things past.

Throughout childhood and adolescence, I suffered from a series of complaints of the kind that came later to be generally known as allergies: rashes suddenly appeared and itched all over my body, or else my lips and nostrils, sometimes too my whole face, would swell painfully, later too, asthma or hay-fever began to affect my breathing. My parents would then consult a variety of French

physicians, each one of whom would develop in turn a very personal theory of his own and then prescribe some treatment or medication that generally proved to be ineffective and might now seem as absurd as the clysters and blood-letting of Molière's comic physicians.

When I was about eight years old, I thus found myself one day in the consulting-room of our elegant and suave family physician, Docteur Ladislas Landowski, who began to question me even more carefully than usual about my various symptoms. After a while, he suggested to my mother that I come again, as he wished to compare my descriptions of my symptoms with those of another patient. On this second visit, I found Docteur Landowski in the company of another physician and the latter's brother, a very frail and nervous man with deep-set eyes and an almost cadaverous complexion, who spoke to me with elaborate circumlocutions, describing in great detail the symptoms of his own ills and questioning me with great insistence about mine. ~~Every now and then~~ Whenever there seemed to be any similarity between his symptoms and mine, he nodded appreciatively and made some comment to the two physicians, who were listening ~~very~~ carefully to our whole exchange of remarks. At the time, however, my co-sufferer failed to leave on me a very ~~lasting~~ deep or lasting impression. It was only much later that I began to understand how much he may have helped me, an inexperienced child, to become more objectively aware of my symptoms so that I was able, thanks to his owns descriptions of his ailments and his patient questioning, to describe them more acurately.

When I was sixteen, I was again being treated by Docteur Landowski, this time at home, where I was bed-ridden with a feverish bout of influenza. I happened to be reading Remembrance of things past when he entered my room and he admitted to me that he had never enjoyed Proust's prose enough to read more than a few pages of the first volume of his masterpiece. Whether as a patient or as a friend, he had always found Proust a rather wordy and difficult crank. Then he added: "If you had

met him again and known him better, I doubt whether you would still be as fascinated by his writings as you now seem to be."

"Met him again?" I enquired, puzzled by the implications of the Doctor's remarks.

"Yes, surely you remember meeting Proust in my office when I brought you together to compare your symptoms."

I was amazed, suddenly remembering the frail and verbose man, his deep-set eyes and cadaverous complexion, his insistent questioning and painstakingly detailed descriptions of his own symptoms. Had this man really been Marcel Proust, or was Docteur Landowski now confusing some equally anxiety-ridden asthmatic former patient of his with Proust? Thus began my years of doubt, of questioning others who had known Proust, of trying to check whether he had really been one of Docteur Landowski's patients and, if he had, whether he might still have consulted him during those years of the World War I. The French writer Paul Brach, who was my cousin Liliane's second husband, had been one of Proust's intimate younger friends during those years and was editing the first volumes of Proust's letters when I questioned him. He simply shrugged his shoulders and replied: "How should I know? He was consulting so many physicians on the advice of so many different friends, why not Docteur Landowski too?"

Neither my mother nor my father could remember having met Proust in Docteur Landowski's office, yet they had both been present on that occasion and both confirmed to me that another patient, accompanied by a physician who might well have been Proust's brother, had also been present. But they could no longer remember who this other patient had been. Had he really been Marcel Proust, they assured me, they would certainly have remembered his identity, since they were sure they had previously met him elsewhere and had friends in common with him, such as Marie Sheikewitch and Hélène de Zuylen-Rothschild, the Baronne who wrote poetry and was also a friend of both Robert de Montesquiou and of the poetess Renée Vivien. But George D. Painter's biography of Proust indeed revealed to me many years later that our family doctor, physician Dr. Ladislas Landowski, had known Proust and even attended Proust's mother on her death-bed.

For a long while I nevertheless felt sure that our family physician had been mistaken, most probably confusing in his memory several similar situations. Perhaps he had really introduced some other asthmatic patient to me, but actually introduced Proust to some other asthmatic child. In any case, as the years went by, the people who had known Proust well enough to help me solve my problem were becoming increasingly rare, and the circumstances of my own life were such that I was less and less likely to meet many of these survivors. Suddenly, however, another anecdote, of another man's ambiguous meeting with Proust, raised the whole problem again in my mind, though in an entirely different social context.

I was then twenty-eight, a graduate student at the University of Chicago, where I was taking Professor Robert Vigneron's seminar on Marcel Proust. A very scrupulous scholar, but afflicted with a notoriously difficult personality, Professor Vigneron insisted constantly on a careful reading of Proust's published letters to friends in order to solve, from evidence contained in these letters, a number of problems in the real life of Proust that were reflected, though in disguise, in the fictional life of his autobiographical hero. We thus happened to be discussing in class the various letters of Proust which cast some light on his friendship with the chauffeur who was the real-life model for Albertine, and on the financial difficulties which Proust experienced as a consequence of this costly friendship or, after the chauffeur's accidental death, when Proust tried to cash a check on a German bank after I had been World War declared in 1914. Again and again, in a number of these letters, Proust referred to this check, drawn on the Warburg bank in Hamburg.

I happened to have known in Hamburg several members of the Warburg family, but they had all emigrated by now, and been expropriated by Hitler's anti-Semitic legislation. I nevertheless decided to write to Bankhaus M.M. Warburg, asking whether they still had any correspondence from Marcel Proust in their archives. Much to my surprise, an official of the

expropriated bank soon replied that they still had a whole file of letters from Proust, but could supply me with photo-copies of them only if they were first authorized to do this by Proust's estate or his heirs. I then wrote to Paris, to Madame Suzy Mante, the daughter of Docteur Robert Proust, who would have been the physician accompanying Marcel Proust if it were true that I had met both of them in Docteur Landowski's office. To Madame Mante, who was Proust's heir, I explained that I was the first cousin of Lillian, late wife of Paul Brach, to whom she had entrusted the task of editing the first volume of her uncle's letters; also, that I was a close friend of Georges Cattaui, whose Proust-studies she encouraged, and likewise of Léon Pierre-Quint, the respected author of the first book of Proust-criticism, actually written and published before the posthumous first publication of the final volumes of Remembrance of things past

All these excellent references proved to be of no avail. Madame Mante remained suspicious, uncooperative and dilatory. I now suspect that she was anxious to obtain copies of these Hamburg letters herself, if only to entrust their publication to one of her many Paris sycophants rather than to me, a student of Professor Vigneron, with whom she was not on the best of terms. Our fruitless correspondence, in any case, was interrupted in 1939 by the "phony" war, and Proust's many letters to Bankhaus M.M. Warburg were never published. During the war-years, they were destroyed, either by the Nazis as part of the bank's old archives that were no longer of legal or commercial significance, or else in the course of an Allied bombing of Hamburg. In 1946, when I enquired again about these letters in Hamburg, no trace of them could be found.

While I was still corresponding from Chicago with Madame Mante, I happened to dine one evening with one of my other professors, the great antifascist Italian writer and scholar Giuseppe Antonio Borgese, who later married one of Thomas Mann's daughters and thus became officially Wystan Auden's brother-in-law, since Erica Mann had married Wystan

in order to obtain a British passport when the Nazis refused to renew her German one. For reasons of his own, Borgese had adopted in exile a slightly sceptical or even hostile attitude towards much of the modern art and literature that I admired. When I asked him, while we dined, how he thought that I might be able to solve my difficulties with Madame Mante, he interrupted me with one of his oddly diabolical laughs that had earned him, among his friends, the nickname "The phantom of the Opera", and began to tell me about his own ambiguous experience with Marcel Proust.

On his frequent trips from Italy to Paris before, and immediately after I., during the World War, Borgese met many of France's more prominent writers and was a guest in most of the French capital's more important literary salons, so that he received review-copies of many new French books, all dedicated and autographed to him by their authors, as is still the custom in France. One day, he thus received in his mail a new French novel that bore, on its fly-leaf, a particularly lengthy and flattering hand-written dedication, followed by the signature of the author, Marcel Proust. But Borgese could not remember ever having met any writer of this name, so he put the book aside, neglected to review it and forgot about it until, some months later, he chanced to pick it up again in a moment of idleness and began to read it. Immediately, he was impressed by the unknown author's rare qualities of observation, psychological analysis and style. Again, he read the very cordial dedication on the fly-leaf. It still suggested to him no known face, no known literary reputation. He decided to enquire about this mysterious author on his next trip to Paris.

A few weeks later Borgese found himself again in one of the more familiar Paris literary salons, where he asked his hostess who "this man Proust" could well be. Had he perhaps met him here? Borgese's hostess laughed and replied:"Of course you met him here. Don't you remember my friend Marcel, the pale dark man who always used to tell us such amusing stories about the people he met in other salons?"

Borgese then remembered immediately a man whom he had always thought truly insignificant, an insufferable snob whose lengthy anecdotes about uninteresting society hostesses always marked him, in Borgese's estimation, as an utter alien in this literary world.

Great writers, thinkers and artists are not necessarily very remarkable people when one meets them. Very often, as it happened to me in the case of my meetings with Joseph Conrad, Paul Valery, Hart Crane, James Joyce or T.S. Eliot, their appearance and manner fail to impress one at first, whereas other people who are not destined to be remembered for any intellectual or artistic achievement may fascinate one as truly remarkable "characters" in real life. Proust himself was well aware of this, since he describes very minutely every peculiarity of speech or of behavior of some "ordinary people", such as Françoise, Madame Cottard or Jupien, so that they finally achieve in his work the same kind of monumental status and immortality as such major artists or thinkers as Vinteuil, Elstir and Bergotte.

My own experience leads me likewise to see now that the "great men" whom I have met, with the possible exception of Carlo Suares and Paul Goodman, have generally played a less important or formative role in my life as "real persons" than their works. Conversely, men and women "of no importance", to quote the title of one of Oscar Wilde's comedies, have very often exerted a very great influence in my life, so that I may now find myself devoting much more attention and space to them in my memoirs than to descriptions of historically more significant people whom I have been privileged to know.

I was made particularly conscious of the "trick perspectives" which can produce in one's memory this kind of disparity between the importance and significance of "men of distinction" and of "ordinary people", as in Proust's life and his writings too, when I chanced to meet in Paris, in 1935, the real-life character who was the main source of inspiration for Proust's creation of Jupien in Remembrance of things past.

I was then working for a Paris publishing-house, Editions du Sagittaire, as assistant to its chief editor, Léon Pierre-Quint, who was preparing for us a revised edition of his monumental critical study of Proust, which needed to be brought up to date now that the last volumes of Proust's masterpiece had at last been posthumously published. For this purpose, Pierre-Quint planned to consult a number of Proust's unpublished letters and had made appointments with some of the recipients or owners of these. Though I wasn't yet aware of it, Pierre-Quint was a drug-addict, often too ill or too drugged to keep some of these appointments. One day he thus asked me to go to a Paris Turkish bath, with the owner of which he had made an appointment to study there some unpublished letters that Proust had written to this Monsieur Lecuzat. Pierre-Quint asked me to copy, in his stead, certain passages in these letters.

The now vanished Bain du Ballon d'Alsace, in the Rue Saint-Lazare, to which I went on this strange errand, should have been preserved as a real historical monument. For many years, it was owned and operated by Albert Lecuzat, known as Jupien to all readers of Proust. A few Proust scholars who have visited it in the course of their literary research have been puzzled, however, because the "Temple of Immodesty" which Proust describes in Time recaptured as the setting of the aging Baron de Charlus' exquisite self-imposed martyrdom is a hotel, not a bath-house. Few of them knew that Albert, before owning the bath-house in the Rue Saint-Lazare, had already managed a small hotel on the same principles and for the same patrons, in a quiet street behind the church of La Madeleine. According to legend, Proust supplied some of the capital for these two ventures, much as Charlus, according to Jupien in the novel, had financed the establishment of the "Temple of Immodesty".

Proust appears indeed to have been a frequent customer, if not also a lavish patron, of at least two such establishments. When I visited Albert in the Rue Saint-Lazare in 1935, he was still proud to be able to show to visiting Proust-scholars, in his private sanctum on the first floor,

an elegant Nineteenth-century mahogany book-case, given to him by Proust. Inherited from Proust's aunt in Illiers, who was the real-life model for the novel's Tante Léonie of Combray this book-case becomes, in the novel, the sofa which the hero inherits from this aunt and presents to the brothel where he used to meet Rachel-quand-du-Seigneur.

Most of the rest of the furniture of this small room, I was proudly told, came from the former home of Proust's own parents.

In this book-case which had seen more respectable if less glorious days, Albert kept at first only a small library of books on genealogies and heraldry, subjects that he enjoyed discussing in great detail with some of his aristocratic patrons. Marcel Proust, in particular, advised and guided him in the pursuit of this harmless hobby, which Albert shared with many another former flunkey or retired governess who could bask, in such readings, in the reflected glory of great and ancient families in whose homes they had served. To this basic library, Albert gradually added a growing collection of works by Proust and Proust's friends and commentators. In the same room, in a desk-drawer that he all too often neglected to lock, Albert also kept an impressive collection of manuscript letters adressed to him by Proust.

But this collection, as the letters increased in value, began slowly to decrease in importance and interest. To writers who consulted him before publishing their commentaries on Proust, Albert generously presented, to express his appreciation of the honor of thus being consulted, some manuscript missive of minor importance, such as a hurried two-line note, brought to him by hand and summoning him to come and see Proust immediately. Other and more important letters were sometimes stolen out of Albert's unlocked desk-drawer by some of the boys whom he employed, and may thus have reached the hands of dealers and collectors of autographs who instigated these acts of larceny.

Most of the letters that Albert allowed me to copy discussed only Proust's stock-market operations. Proust appears to have had great confidence in Albert's integrity as a

courrier and to have employed him often to take orders from his sickroom to his Paris brokers, or to collect money from his bank after his sales of stocks. The letters that I saw revealed that Albert was kept particularly busy in this capacity when Proust was again and again in urgent need of ready cash to face the extravagant demands of Agostinelli, the chauffeur and lover immortalized in his novel as Albertine. In other letters to Albert, Proust gave instructions of a very different nature, revealing that he also relied on his services as a procurer.

Proust generally gave Albert exact specifications concerning the desired appearance and behavior of the young men whom he hoped to meet. As I read and copied these letters in Albert's office, I felt that the boys whom he procured for Proust had to be carefully ~~trained~~ rehearsed, as if to play a part in a pre-conceived drama in which nothing was left to chance or to their own spontaneity, or for a ritualistic performance of an allegory that repeated again and again some secret trauma or frustrated desire of Proust's own past life. It was thus in the yard of Albert's hotel, near the church of La Madeleine, that Proust once staged and witnessed the now legendary rat-hunt in which the boys of the establishment had to chase and beat to death some rats which were allowed to escape into the yard when one of the boys was sent to open the door of the toilet where, on Proust's own instructions, they had previously been concealed for that purpose.

The Bain du Ballon d'Alsace was situated in the narrower and quieter part of the Rue Saint-Lazare, at the far end of a courtyard that one reached by going through the archway of the main building's entrance on the sidewalk. In the yard, potted plants gave the entrance to the bath-house the appearance of an old-fashioned private home or of a Roman pensione where the heroine of a Henry James novel might have stayed on her grand tour of Europe. On the ground floor of the baths and near this entrance, Albert generally sat at a kind of counter, serving customers as soon as they came, acting as cashier and garding their valuables in a safe-deposit box.

Customers who were not yet personally known to Albert or recommended to him by regular patrons were generally led by one of the attendant masseurs to a small bathroom on the ground floor. Often, such customers wanted only a bath, with or without a regular massage. Like Madame Sesostris, the "famous Clairvoyante" in T.S. Eliot's The Waste-land, Albert knew that "one must be so careful these days": only to patrons already known to him did he grant the privilege of choosing their masseur from a group of idle attendants who generally waited, draped only in towels, in a small room where they read the sports-news or played cards and argued rather listlessly. For such patrons who knew "the custom of the country", larger rooms upstairs were furnished with double beds and offered more privacy.

When I was introduced to him by letter by Léon Pierre-Quint, Albert was already growing bald, with greying hair on the sides. He was tall, blue-eyed with what is known as "watery" eyes, and rather stout. His manner was extremely ceremonious, like that of a liveried footman announcing distinguished guests by the door to a very formal reception. As he spoke, he chose and pronounced his words very carefully. At times, his manner and his unctuous voice suggested that he might be an unfrocked priest.

But Albert's two establishments, the hotel that he had previously managed and the Bain du Ballon d'Alsace, were not the only real-life models for the "Temple of Immodesty" described in Time recaptured. Though Proust relied mainly on Albert as courrier and procurer, he appears to have also visited anothe Paris establishment of much the same nature, the Hotel du Saumon situated in the Passage du Saumon, one of the more abandoned and dilapidated covered arcades of Nineteenth-century Paris that, somewhere between the Rue Réaumur and the former area of the Halles, still seem to be haunted by the ghosts of the gaslit "Ville-lumière" of yore.

I have always been fascinated by Proust's gift for synthesis, which allowed him to borrow individual peculiarities, for one of his fictional characters, from several different real-life models, but without his combination of these

various peculiarities ever appearing, in his novel, at all improbable or incongruous. Reading Proust again and again over the years, I became more and more convinced that he never invented any of the more significant ingredients of any such synthesis that he achieved, but borrowed them all from his observations of real life. Often, as I read even the most learned and ingenious of Proust's many commentators, I feel that some important real-life model still needs to be identified. It has been my luck to identify two such neglected models, and to prove thereby, in both cases, that Proust's synthesis could be achieved from at least three different models.

Neither of the real-life persons, Ephrussi and Haas, who are reputed by Proust-scholars to have served as models for the creation of Charles Swann, is known to have had Swann's very characteristic theory about the paintings of Vermeer or Swann's equally idiosyncratic habit of comparing people among his own contemporaries, such as a coachman, to those depicted by great artists of the past in some of their most famous works. Had Proust invented these two very significant details of Swann's personality?

When the journals of the distinguished Paris art-dealer René Gimpel, who died in a Nazi concentration-camp, were at last published posthumously, I was asked to review the original French edition for a Paris monthly, then again the American translation for The New-York Times. To my great surprise, I discovered both of these very significant details of Swann's personality revealed in Gimpel's journals, in fact both at a very early date, some years before World War I, when Gimpel and Proust used to meet in Cabourg, the seaside resort described by Proust as Balbec; and this was also some years before Proust is known to have first begun writing his masterpiece. I was thus the first critic to prove that Gimpel had been a third real-life model for Charles Swann.

It was not by chance, but in the course of a deliberate quest, that I was led to discover the Hotel du Saumon and to

identify it as another probable real-life model for the "Templ of Immodesty." Too many details in Proust's descriptiom of its location and lay-out failed to conform with my own observation of Albert's two establishments. I therefore began to enquire among Proust's surviving friends whether they knew of any othe establishment of the same nature that had existed in Proust's life and that he might have visited. All those whom I thus questioned claimed blushingly to be quite ignorant of these matters, but the answer was nevertheless given me by a notorious London rake, the Earl of Tredegar, who may never have met Proust, but who had certainly known Albert and all other Paris establishments of the kind for many years.

When I first visited the Hotel du Saumon with the Earl of Tredegar, it was run by a Tunisian Arab named Said, who mus then have been in his late thirties. I went there several times in 1935 and 1936, hoping in vain to obtain from Said, who was friendly in every other respect, some information about Proust. Though Said allowed me willingly to explore the whole of his hotel, so that I was able to identify several minor details described by Proust in the "Temple of Immodesty" Said was much more reticent than Albert about the identity of his patrons. Like Jupien, Albert could never refrain from boasting about his high-born patrons, taking you into his confidence and revealing to you some detail of their genealogy or of their less clandestine life, together with highly spiced anecdotes about their secret vices.

Said always behaved as if he knew nothing about anyone who had ever frequented his hotel. No matter how often you came, he would always greet you, in the presence of a third party, as if you were a stranger, even if you happened to greet him by name. I once showed him a photograph of Proust, hoping that he might admit having known him. His only comment was: "So many people come here, how can I remember them all?" Only once did I hear Said break this rule of tactful ignorance. I had last seen him in 1936 and, ten years later, happened to be in his neighborhood of Paris, on leave from Germany and wearing

an American uniform. Out of sheer curiosity, as I had time to spare, I went to see if the Hotel du Saumon had survived the War and the German occupation. Saïd was still there, very much aged, in his tiny and crowded street-level office, on the immediate right as you entered the hotel from the covered arcade. He recognized me at once, smiled and exclaimed: "Well, you took your time before coming to liberate us!" He then called one of the boys and sent him out to buy a bottle of champagne, which we all three drank together. After that, we were real friends, and I made a point of visiting him every once in a while.

In the late afternoon or the evening, Saïd often went on expeditions to the cafés of Montmartre and Montparnasse, later too to those of Saint-Germain-des-Prés. He also made a habit of covering considerable distances on foot in the more populous working-class districts of Paris and its industrial suburbs, where he forrayed to recruit boys and renew his stock-in-trade. If he then met one of his patrons, he never greeted him unless he himself had first been greeted. Though less reticent, Albert was, on the other hand, at all times more concerned with preserving his own dignity, whereas Saïd could be, among friends, a real comedian, with a fine sense of "camp". On one occasion, I found him celebrating Spring, after a particularly cold Paris winter, by wearing, like a young shepherd in his native Tunisia, a sprig of jasmine tucked coquettishly over his ear and under the Basque béret that he always wore to conceal his baldness. I made some remark about the flower and Saïd, with an arch smile and an air of affected modesty, replied: "Un rien me pare.... a mere nothing can doll me up." He had a very fine sense of idiom and brevity in French and only a very slight Arab accent if he was angry with one of his boys. Though an Arab, he was less obsequious than Albert.

He had never been, like Albert, a flunkey in aristocratic homes. I tried to make Saïd speak about his own past, but without much success, except when he spoke nostalgically of his own pastoral boyhood in Tunisia. I was able to gather, however, that

he had run away from home, after some adolescent escapade, and enlisted in Tunisia in a French colonial regiment. After becoming an officer's orderly and fighting too in France in the ~~Great~~ World War I, he was demobilized in France and settled there as a civilian somewhere in the provinces. Obviously, he had lived for many years on very intimate terms with one of the French officers whose orderly he had been, and from whom he seemed to have acquired his somewhat aristocratic sense of the niceties of the French language as well as distinctly elegant, though provincial and old-fashioned, tastes in interior decoration. His hôtel's best room was like a guest bedroom in a modest French chateau. The double bed was entirely upholstered with toile de Jouy of an eighteenth-century pattern, block-printed in red on white linen cloth and representing two almost identical ~~xxxxxx~~ allegorical scenes that were fantastically appropriate to the purposes this room generally served: in a classical landscape adorned with trees and a few ancient columns of a ruined temple, a boat ferried two passengers across a stream. In alternate scenes, a winged Eros ferried a bearded Chronos or a bearded Chronos ferried a winged Eros. Beneath each of these scenes, a printed dictum reminiscent of the one that Chaucer's Prioress wore on her broach, elucidated this very Ovidian allegory: "L'Amour fait passer le Temps" and "Le Temps fait passer l'Amour".

The curtains of the room were of the same toile de Jouy. Above a Directoire black-marble mantlepiece, a mirror set in an antique guilded frame stood behind a Second-Empire ormolu clock and its matching pair of vases filled with faded artificial flowers, and all three pieces were mounted on marble bases and protected beneath dusty glass globes. The wash-stand was old-fashioned, without running water. It was built of massive mahogany, with a white marble top, on which stood a basin, a big pitcher of cold water and a set of soap-dishes and other accessories that all matched. Beneath the wash-stand, a portable bidet and a slop-bucket to match the basin and pitcher were modestly concealed behind a small curtain that matched the bed and the window-curtains.

If one wanted hot water, one rang a bell and one of the boys brought it in a big pitcher.

Said admitted to me in 1946 that his business was not very active. Too many of his old patrons had died in the Resistance or in concentration-camps or were still in the armed forces or in prison as former Collaborationists. Many of his older boys too had disappeared. "That fool Vincent," a former Foreign Legionary whom I had known there before the War and who, half Arab and half Sicilian from the Soukh Al-Granah quarter of Tunis, had abandoned Saïd in 1937 to become "Mon légionnaire" in La Môme Piaf's song and her love-life, went and joined the Fascist Militia under the German Occupation, Saïd told me, and was lynched by the Resistance boys at the time of the Liberation. Saïd indeed seemed to be so depressed and so glad to see me again that I moved into his hotel the next day for the rest of my leave.

Few other modestly priced Paris hotels, in a cold winter so soon after the War, could offer any heating: here I had every evening a wood-fire, which Saïd supplied at a reasonable price with logs from the Black Market. For breakfast too, I was brought real Black-market coffee, no wartime substitute of roasted barley-seeds. I have rarely known in Paris a quieter hotel-room. I was able to correct there in peace the German translation of my book on Oscar Wilde.

I continued for several years to visit Saïd fairly regularly, until I happened to remain absent from Paris for two years. On my return, I delayed coming to see him until I chanced to be again in that section of Paris, where I rarely had other reasons to go. When I then called at the Hotel du Saumon, I was told that Saïd had retired from his business, and gone to live elsewhere near the Etoile, but there he had recently died. The new proprietor of the Hotel looked at me with suspicion, behaving as if he were anxious to steer me away as tactfully and as soon as possible: his hotel now appeared to have really become as respectable as it had seemed to be when I briefly lived there in 1946.

Sic transit gloria mundi: the Proustian "Temples of Immodesty" and the oddly hospitable little hotels and Turkish baths of Paris that a Baron de Charlus might once have frequented have nearly all disappeared, decreasing slowly in number as the Paris working-class boys, with higher wages in a more affluent society, are now modernizing their homes even in the poorer neighborhoods and supplying themselves with bathing-facilities of their own, with water-heaters and showers. Beside nearly all factories in the Paris industrial suburbs now provid showers for their workers, so that public neighborhood bath-houses are no longer as popular as they used to be. A few of them can still rely, however, on a sufficient number of regular customers over week-ends, especially in neighborhoods where large numbers of North-african Arab workers live mainly i slummy and overcrowded hotels that offer no bathing facilities.

On Friday evenings, Saturday afternoons and Sunday mornings, many of these Arabs still go to a neighborhood Turkish bath, some of which also offer launderette facilities. In Winte the regular patrons often spend several hours there, meeting their friends, discussing the news, listening to Arab radio-broadcasts or reading Arabic newspapers together in a well-heat lounge where they wait until their laundry is dry or until closing-time. Then they must go out again into the inhospitably cold streets of Paris. Such bains de vapeur thus serve in Paris much the same social and spiritual purpose, for the city's Arab expatriates, as the hammam attached to a mosque in a traditional Moslem city or as the House Tamboran club-house for men in a Sepik River village of New Guinea.

The presence of so many lonely Arab bachelors who have a reputation for their readiness to relax in homosexual dalliance attracts also, to some of these baths, a curiously promiscuous underworld of French and foreign homosexuals. Some more adventurous or fastidious Arabs, on the other hand, prefer not to frequent such baths in their own neighborhood, where their love-life might cause comment among their less permissive or more strictly religious compatriots, and can thus be met, together Instead, they can

with others who come for this purpose over the weekend from the provinces, in a few more elegant and centrally located Paris baths that are notorious meeting-places for homosexuals. But the Paris police also sends, to most of these baths, an occasional agent provocateur or stool-pigeon. Every once in a while, some unfortunate homosexual is thus arrested in a Turkish bath for flouting French law, which permits homosexual relations between consenting adult males, but forbids "indecent "exposure" and behavior that might shock the more modest customers in any public place. The wiser patrons of these establishments have therefore developed a practice of lavishly tipping one of the attendants, generally the bartender, before engaging in any activity that might be considered reprehensible. In exchange, the gratified attendant then utters a discreet warning if any known stool-pigeon of the police happens to turn up that day.

Over long weekends when London is celebrating a Bank Holiday, the more notorious ~~[illegible]~~ Paris baths, especially the one known as the Duchesse de Penthièvre because it happens to be in the Rue de Penthièvre, used to be crowded with English customers and resound with shrill exclamations uttered in the purest BBC accent. Catering mainly to such foreign tourists, a few Paris Arabs, most of whom were Algerians, had developed in the city's better baths, over the years, a kind of respectable practice that should perhaps have earned them some official recognition from the French Ministry of Economy as earners of foreign exchange or as a source of invisible exports that contributed towards maintaining the stability of the national currency. One of these Algerians, in particular, was generally known for many years, among patrons of the baths in the Rue de Cambronne that have now been demolished in order to build a more profitable high-rise appartment-house, as "the Prince", because of his lordly physical appearance and his scrupulous honesty and courtesy. He thus had a considerable international practice of regular clients, many of whom would warn him by letter or telegram, from as far as Hollywood, Buenos Aires or Tokyo, of their forthcoming visit to the French capital and of their requirements. The Prince

was indeed appreciated both for the quality of his own superlative performance and for the reliability of his services, similar to those of Albert, as a procurer of equally satisfactory Arab playmates. But I doubt whether he ever received as complex written specifications as those that I read in some of Albert's letters from Proust. Nevertheless, the Prince's practice included a number of well-known foreign actors, writers, artists and politicians, so that he may well have been immortalized by now in poetry or prose that is destined to be more widely read than mine.

Another Paris Arab, a handsome grey-haired elder statesman of the café-terraces of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, had long specialized in entertaining Scandinavian visitors, generally unmarried Swedish career-women or divorcées, though he also had a small but select practice among elderly Stockholm homosexuals, from one of whom he once learned the rudiments of Swedish which proved to be so useful in his subsequent career. But he no longer frequents any Turkish baths. Instead he has established his headquarters in one of the more respectable Left-bank cafés, where he collects his mail daily, tips the waiters generously for his abstemious orders of drinks, and spends a couple of hours very ostentatiously reading Stockholm's Dagens Nyheter, which he purchases from the news-stand by the Café des Deux Magots, disdaining the more vulgar and crowded news-stand of Le Drugstore on the opposite side of the Boulevard, where a veritable riff-raff of prostitutes of both sexes always loiters.

Sooner or later as he sips his coffee, his reading-matter attracts the attention of some new Scandinavian customer, or of a friend of a friend who has been told in Stockholm, Göteborg, Malmö, Oslo, Bergen, Helsinki, Tampere or Copenhagen, to look out for him in Paris and identify him by his appearance and his reading-habits. A graduate of Said academy and of the vanished baths of the Rue de Cambronne where the Prince had first recruited him, he has struck out on his own as an independent self-employed businessman whose stock-in-trade is himself. Like Madame Sesostris and

Albert, he too has learned discretion because "one must be so careful these days". The off-beat hotels and Turkish baths of Paris thus prove that they can develop in a gifted individual, as in any other competitive market-economy, a sense of private enterprise that contributes towards promoting upward social mobility, on which every true democracy must be founded in order to stave off Communism and other totalitarian regimes and avoid the kind of feudal class-distinctions that might otherwise become too rigid and permanent.

This book was published in Paris
on October first 2019 in a
limited edition of thirty copies,
signed by the publisher.

This is copy _____.

Alyscamps Press
Paris